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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005913

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SUBJECT: JORDANIANS CONDEMN SHARM AL-SHEIKH BOMBINGS

REF: AMMAN 5859

Classified By: Acting DCM Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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1. (U) SUMMARY: King Abdullah led Jordan's public condemnation of the July 23 bombings in Sharm al-Sheikh, calling the attacks "barbaric" acts of terrorism that have no grounding in Islam. He telephoned President Mubarak to express Jordan's solidarity with Egypt, as ordinary Jordanians and the media expressed their shock at the senselessness of the attacks. Meanwhile, Jordan's security services stepped up security at tourist attractions and hotels throughout the country. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) King Abdullah on July 23 condemned the terrorist attacks in Sharm al-Sheikh as "barbaric," and vowed no let up in the fight against terrorism. He also telephoned and sent a cable to Egyptian President Mubarak, reiterating Jordan's support for Egypt "under the current difficult circumstances," according to Jordan's official news agency Petra. Meanwhile, PM Badran telephoned his Egyptian counterpart Ahmad Nazif to express his condolences and pledge Jordan's support. Deputy PM and government spokesperson Marwan Muasher also issued a statement condemning the attacks.

3. (U) The bombings received extensive front-page coverage in all local papers on July 24, and lead editorials and commentaries almost exclusively focused on the carnage. The press focused on such attacks' incompatibility with Islam, and called on the world, especially Arabs and Muslims, to speak out clearly and forcefully against terrorism (reftel). Chief editor of Arabic daily al-Ghad called on "Arabs and Muslims to express their rejection and condemnation of these acts publicly, and by various means, starting with demonstrations by millions in Arab capitals from Amman to Rabat, and from Damascus to Cairo, in a popular action that says to terrorists: 'You are not of us, nor of our faith, and our cases are innocent of your acts.'"

4. (C) The fact that the bombings caused mainly Egyptian casualties -- in a place where many Jordanians vacation -- has horrified Jordan. Noting that the bombings in Egypt followed closely the attacks in London, and against the backdrop of ongoing violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel, some worry it is the prelude to a larger and more frightening period of violence in the region. University of Jordan political science professor Mohammad Kheir Mustafa commented that what happened in Sharm was no less dangerous than what happened in London, and means that the "hand of terrorism can reach anywhere." Reflecting widespread fears, he speculated that Jordan might be one of the coming targets. President of Mu'ta University Suleiman Arabiyat said such seemingly senseless and random violence makes positive movement on the peace process and towards stabilizing Iraq that much more critical. Director of al-Quds Center for Political Studies Ureib al-Rintawi termed the attacks as a "fatal blow" to Egypt's economy and representative of the failure of the war on terrorism. The Sharm and London attacks show that there is a new generation of terrorists who have no criminal record, proving "we will live long" with this phenomenon.

5. (C) Reflecting the high threat environment and real concern about attacks here, Jordan's Public Security Directorate (PSD) has heightened security at Jordan's hotels, shopping malls, and tourist sites, including those in Amman, Aqaba, the Dead Sea, and Petra. Post security contacts report that more security checkpoints have been set up around tourist sites to better screen persons entering those sites. The Jerash Cultural Festival and the Global Village are receiving special security attention with the deployment of explosive detection dogs and additional security personnel. Public Security Director (PSD) General Muhammad Majid al-Eitan reviewed with Charge on July 25 measures taken in the wake of the bombings. Eitan, on secondment from the JAF and one of the Jordanian military's ablest officers, said stepped-up measures include both fixed and mobile patrols at all of Jordan's premier hotels and tourist sites. Aqaba itself he described as "sealed off" and well penetrated by intelligence officers. He had personally reviewed the measures at Amman-area hotels and embassies, often making late-night spot inspections, sometimes in plainclothes, to satisfy himself on the state of readiness. He termed the threat of terrorist attacks in Jordan as real, although no new, specific threat information related to westerners had developed. His main concern was that the highly visible

security precautions at hotels, tourist sites, and embassies would push terrorists to look at even softer targets, with Amman-area shopping malls being a considerable preoccupation.

Eitan said he had visited Taba and Sharm al-Sheikh recently, and given the weak security measures in place, was not surprised by the attacks. He had repeatedly warned his Egyptian counterpart that there were insufficient numbers of uniformed police at hotels and in the town. He believed they provided an essential deterrent that plainclothes police do not provide.

No Economic Impact Yet

16. (U) Officials confirmed that tourist activity in the Red Sea port and resort town of Aqaba (and the ferry transport service between Aqaba and Nweibeh in Egypt) were so far unaffected by the bombings. Hotels in Aqaba -- which local boosters hope to make the "Sharm al-Sheikh of Jordan"-- continue to report high occupancy rates, according to Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority chief commissioner Nader Dahabi, who said no reservations for foreign vacationers had been canceled.

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